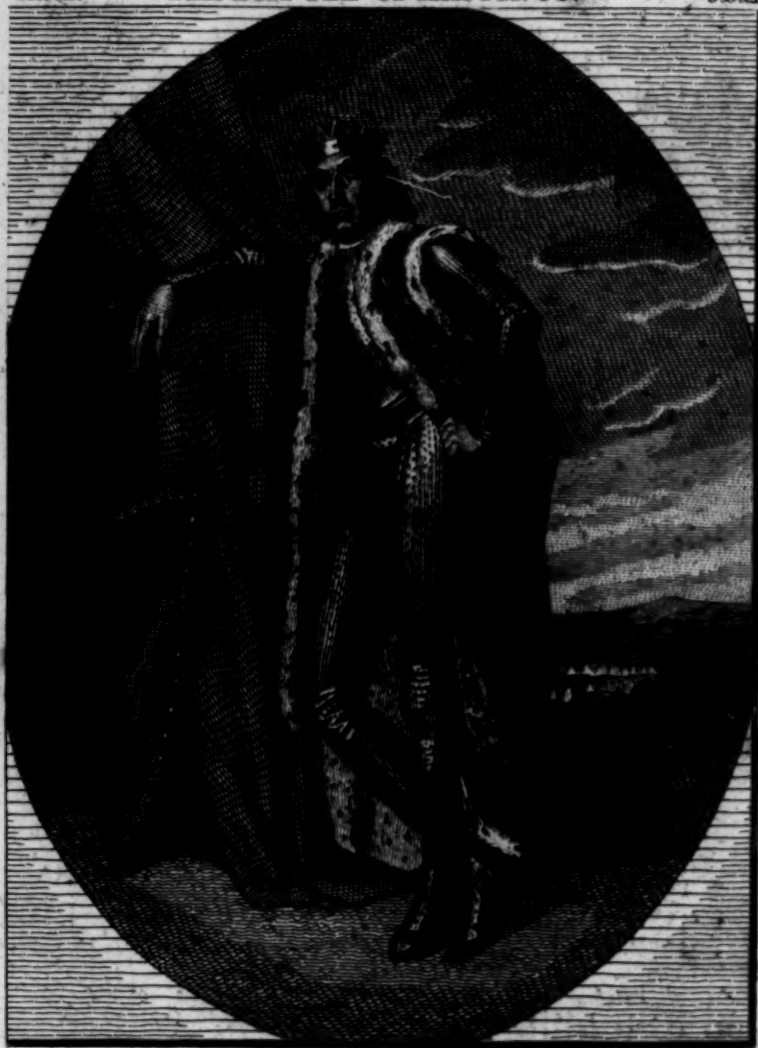


Act III.

THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS.

Scenal.



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MR. BENSLEY as HAROLD.

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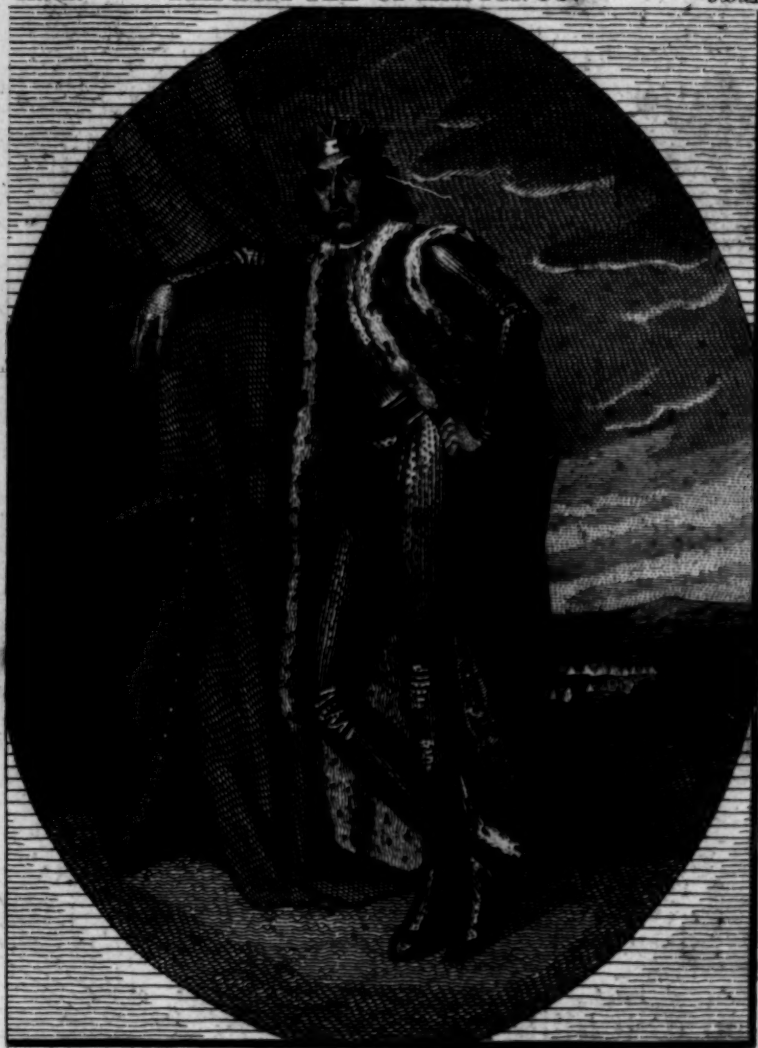
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ACT V. THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS.



Burney del.

A. Smith sculp.

London. Printed for J. Bell British Library, Strand, March 22 1793.

7 JUL 52

THE
BATTLE OF HASTINGS.

A
TRAGEDY.

BY RICHARD CUMBERLAND, ESQ.

ADAPTED FOR
THEATRICAL REPRESENTATION,
AS PERFORMED AT THE
THEATRES-ROYAL, DRURY-LANE AND COVENT-GARDEN.

REGULATED FROM THE PROMPT-BOOKS,
By Permission of the Managers.

The Lines distinguished by inverted Commas, are omitted in the Representation.

LONDON:

Printed for the Proprietors, under the Direction of JOHN BELL,
British-Library, STRAND,
Bookseller to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales.

MDC CXCIII.



PROLOGUE.

SPOKEN BY MR. HENDERSON.

*To holy land, in superstition's day,
When bare-foot pilgrims trod their weary way,
By mother church's unremitting law
Scourg'd into grace, with shoulders red and raw;
Kneeling demure before the sacred shrine,
On the hard flint they begg'd the boon di-vine;
Pardon for what offending flesh had done,
And pity for the long, long course they'd run,
Fines, pains and penalties, securely past,
Slow pac'd forgiveness met their prayer at last,
Full absolution from conceding Rome,
Cancell'd all sin, past, present, and to come.*

*Your poet thus prophanelly led aside
To range o'er tragic land without a guide,
To pick perhaps, with no invidious aim,
A few cast fallings from the tree of fame.
Damn'd, though untried, by the despotic rule
Of the stern doctors in detraction's school;
Lash'd down each column of a public page,
And driv'n o'er burning ploughshares to the stage,
Be-rhim'd and ridicul'd with doggrel wit,
Sues out a pardon from his Pope—the Pit.
Pensive he stands, in penitential weeds,
With a huge rosary of untold beads;
Sentenc'd for past offences to rehearse,
Ave Apollos to the God of Verse;
And sure there's no one but an author knows
The penance, which an author undergoes.*

*If then your worships a few stripes award,
Let not your beadles lay them on too hard;
For in the world there's not a thing so thin,
So full of feeling, as your Poet's skin:
What if, perchance, he snatch'd a playful kiss
From that free hearted romp the Comic Miss;
That frolick's past, he's turn'd to years of grace,
And a young sinner now supplies his place.
Sure you'll not grudge a little sober chat
With this demure, old, tabby, tragic cat;
No charge lies here of conversation crim,
He hopes you'll think her fame no worse for him.*

44

[Faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page]

Dramatis Personæ.

DRURY-LANE.

Men.

| | | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|---|---|----------------|
| HAROLD, King of England, | - | - | - | Mr. Bensley. |
| EDGAR ATHELING, | - | - | - | Mr. Henderson. |
| Earl EDWIN, | - | - | - | Mr. Palmer. |
| Earl WALTHERF, | - | - | - | Mr. Brereton. |
| Earl of MERCIA, Brother to Harold, | - | - | - | Mr. Norris. |
| Earl of NORTHUMBERLAND, | - | - | - | Mr. Aickin. |
| SIFFRIC, | - | - | - | Mr. Farren. |
| REGINALD, | - | - | - | Mr. Chaplin. |
| RAYMOND, | - | - | - | Mr. Hurst. |
| DUNCAN, a Scottish Seer, | - | - | - | Mr. Chambers. |

Women.

| | | | | |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|--------------|
| MATILDA, Daughter to Harold, | - | - | - | Miss Younge. |
| EDWINA, | - | - | - | Mrs. Yates. |
| SABINA, | - | - | - | Mrs. Colles. |

Attendants on MATILDA, Guards, Foresters, Wardens, and various Attendants.



THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS.

ACT I. SCENE I.

The Outside of a stately ancient Castle. The Gate closed, and the Bugle in the Slings. Time, before Break of Day. Enter Earl EDWIN.

Edwin.

WHETHER 'tis now the secret witching hour,
When the smart imps work their malignant spells
Unfriendly to man's health; or that Heaven sends
These warnings, these misgivings to forerun
And harbinger some strange calamity,
I know not: but there 's something passing here
Beyond the mind's conjecture ominous.

RAYMOND speaks from the Walls.

Ray. Stand! who goes there?

Ed. A friend.

Ray. May none but friends

10

Approach these gates! what wakeful man art thou,
Whom busy care provokes thus early forth,
Ere the grey twilight glimmers in the east?

Ed. Know'st thou not me; and needs there light for that?
Sounds not this voice familiar to thine ear,
Or have the darkling wizzards of the night

Confounded thy clear organs? Thee I know;
Raymond, descend and open to thy lord.

Ray. My lord, my master!—

[*He disappears.*

Ed. [*Alone.*] Venerable pile,

20

Whose plain rough features show like honesty;
Cradle of loyalty from earliest time;
Ye antique towers, courts, banner-bearing halls,
Trophies, and tombs of my renown'd forefathers;
And you, surrounding oaks, fathers and sons,
And old, old grandsires, chroniclers of time,
By which the forest woodman marks his tale:
If fate will doom you to a Norman master,
Farewell! ye perish in your country's fall.

RAYMOND comes out from the Castle.

Ray. See, lord! your castle opens wide its arms, 30
Your porters, warders, foresters shall rouse:
Herald, provoke the bugle: spread the joy.

[*Herald goes to sound the bugle.*

Ed. What joy?—forbear: there is no joy for Edwin.

Ray. Are we then lost; is Normandy victorious?

Ed. No: in the swoln and pregnant womb of fate
Lies the yet unborn hour.—Dismiss the herald,
And gently close the gate.— [Ray. closes the gate.

Ye, who have bosoms,
Unscar'd by sharp vexation's thorny scourge,
Sleep while you may. 'Tis; come hither, Raymond; 40
Nay, I account thee as a friend—be nearer:
Pass'd all things quiet on thy watch this night?

Ray. All things were quiet.

Ed. Far, as well as near—

Wide as thine ear could carry—no rude straggler
Scouring the night—no neighing at the gate?

No trampling heard ? no talking, as of parties
Met by assignment ?

Ray. Hah !—in very truth
To all these questions, no. 50

Ed. I must believe thee ;
The more I 'm lost in wonder : but confess,
At my last question wherefore didst thou start,
And arch thy brow significantly ? speak ;
Thou may'st reveal thy thoughts.

Ray. Nay, good my lord,
My thoughts are little worth.

Ed. I see thou 'rt cautious,
So let it pass—How fares our sister ? blooms
The rose of health fresh on Edwina's cheek, 60
As it was wont ?

Ray. It brightens as it blows.

Ed. Yes, Raymond, she is fair ; Heaven for the sins
Of this offending country, made her fair ;
Oh, I had treasur'd up such thoughts !—But mark,
Edmund ; the youth whom I have father'd, he,
Who in the beating surge of black despair,
But for my saving arm, had sunk outright
And perish'd fathoms deep, last night i'th' camp,
Soon as the guard had gone its stated round, 70
Vaulted the trench like Perseus on his steed,
Then fled, as if he 'd overtake the wind,
Whither Heaven knows.

Ray. Fled !—death to honour, fled !

Ed. Fled at this glorious crisis. Oh, it cuts
My heart's best hope asunder !

Ray. Heavenly vengeance
O'ertake and strike him !—

Ed. Peace !—You must not curse him.

Ray. Hah ! wherefore not ?

80

Ed. Because—expect a wonder—

Because he is thy king.

Ray. Uphold me, Heaven !

Ed. Mine and thy king ; of Alfred's line a king ;
Edgar, call'd Atheling ; the rightful lord
Of this ungrateful realm, which Kentish Harold
Audaciously usurps—

Ray. What do I hear ?

Alas I thought him poor, an orphan youth
The child of hard misfortune.

90

Ed. Think so still,

Or keep these thoughts untold.

Ray. Had I known this,

I would have serv'd him hourly on my knees :
O noble sir, direct me where to seek him,
How to restore him to these peaceful shades.

Ed. Not for the world ; no, if we meet again,
Back to the English camp he shall repair ;
The scene of all his hopes : Oh such a form
Of majesty with youthful beauty grac'd !
He was the soldier's idol ; such a spirit
Beam'd from his eyes, his presence like the sun
Gladden'd beholders hearts.

100

Ray. I have a mistress,
A young and beauteous lady—

Ed. Name her not,

The source of all my shame : Shall it be said
That Edwin rais'd his sovereign to the throne,
Only to place a sister at his side ?
Perish the thought ! Now learn a mighty secret—
Matilda loves him ; Harold's matchless daughter
Loves Edgar Atheling ; her dower a kingdom :
Therefore no talk of Edmund and Edwina,

110

They meet no more. Now, Raymond, had I lodg'd
My secret in a light and leaky bosom,
Better my sword should rip it up at once
And take it back again—But thou art honest.

Ray. You were not wont to doubt me.

Ed. Nay, I will not.

Hah! what is this? who bade this music forth?

120

[Clarinets at a distance.]

Ray. My lord, I know not.

Ed. Whence proceeds it? Mark.

Ray. If my ear fail not, from the beachen grove,
West of king Alfred's tower.

Ed. Lead to the place.

[Exeunt.]

Enter EDGAR with Foresters bearing Clarinets.

Edg. Now breathe a strain, if your rude stops will let you,
Soft as a lover's sigh—Nay, you 're too loud—
Mark, where you 've rous'd the gentle sleeping deer.
Fellows, begone; away!—Edwina!

[Edwina appears at a window.]

Edw. Edmund!

130

Oh, I have suffered a long age of absence.

Edg. Come then and make these few short moments blest.

Edw. How shall I come? Tear down these iron bars
And leap into thine arms? What shall I do?

Edg. *[Goes to the castle gate and discovers it to be open.]*
By all my hopes, the castle gate is open;
Descend; be swift!

Edw. As thine own thoughts.

[She disappears.]

Edg. *[Alone.]* O love!

Small elf, who by the glow-worm's twinkling light,
Fine fairy-finger'd child, can slip the bolt,
While the cramm'd warden snores, this is thy doing.

140

Lo, where she comes, so breaks the morning forth,
Blushing and breathing odours—

Enter EDWINA.

O thou trembler !
Rest on my faithful bosom ; fairest, tell me,
Still dost thou love ? speak, is thine Edmund welcome ?
Edw. Is the sun welcome to the wakeful eyes
Of the wreck'd mariner, when o'er the waves
The long expected dayspring of his hope,
Mounts in the worship'd east—But why comes Edmund 150
Thus wrapt in darkness at this secret hour
As to a guilty meeting ?

Edg. 'Tis the hour
Sacred to love and me, ere noisy labour
Wakens the sun, while yet the fairy elves
Dance in their dewy rounds ; the silent hour
Before the lark her shrill-ton'd matins sings,
Or morning issues from the nuptial east,
And to the bosoms of the nursing hours
The new-born day commits : It is the hour 160
When every flying minute should be wafted
Back to the skies on downy wings of love.

Edw. Away, your words affrights me ; you comfort
With mad ambition, Edmund ; and your love
So gentle once, is like the wars you follow,
Fiery and fierce.

Edg. Instruct me in thy wishes ;
Tell me what love should be.

Edw. Love should be pure,
Harmless as pilgrims kisses on the shrines 170
Of virgin martyrs ; holy as the thoughts
Of dying saints, when angels hover o'er them ;

Harmonious, gentle, soft; such love should be,
The zephyr—not the whirlwind, of the soul.

Edg. Yes, but my love, like never-ending time,
Will neither be determin'd, nor describ'd.

The poet by the magic of his song
Can charm the list'ning moon, ascend the spheres,
And in his airy and extravagant flight
Belt wide creation's round; yet can he never 180
Invent that form of words to speak my passion.

Edw. If such your passion, why this secret meeting;
Why talk of silent hours? Let earth and heaven
Look on and witness to your love! so truth,
So nature speaks—I know no other language.

Edg. Oh, that the throne of this proud realm were mine!
That I may say before the applauding world;
Ascend, my lovely bride, and be a queen.

Edw. A queen! what idle dreams perplex thy fancy?
Are there no blessings for the poor and humble? 190

Edg. Yes, but a brother's curse—

Edw. A brother's curse!

Doth he not love thee, wait upon thee hourly,
Talk of thee ever, bend down his proud spirit
Ev'n to a vassal's homage? Nay, by heaven,
With an idolatry of soul he loves thee!
And shall he not applaud me for my choice?

Edg. He will renounce thee, hate thee for thy choice.

Edw. Away, I'll not believe it: hate! renounce!
It cannot be; hence with this dark reserve, 200
If thou know'st aught, which honour should unfold,
I do conjure thee, speak; though late, confess.

Edg. By heaven, thy brother—

Enter EDWIN hastily.

Ed. Are you found, young sir?

O shame, shame, shame ! Is this the friend, the hero ?
Have I deserv'd this from you ?

Edg. If to love.

The best, the fairest of her sex is base,
Vile and ungrateful ; if it be a sin
Morning and eve to name her in my prayers, 210
I am of all most guilty.

Ed. You abuse

The weakness of a fond unguarded orphan,
Parlying in secret by the moon's pale beam :
The tenderest flower that withers at the breeze,
Or, if the amorous sun but steal a kiss,
Drops its soft head and dies, is not more frail
Than maiden reputation ; 'tis a mirror
Which the first sigh defiles.

Edg. Look at that form ; 220

With all thy cold philosophy survey it,
And wonder, if thou can'st, why I adore.

Ed. Away, nor vex my too, too patient spirit
With this fond rhapsody : Hence, and to horse !
Buckle afresh your glittering armour on ;
For England, not Edwina, now demands you.
By your thrice-plighted oath I do conjure you,
By all the world calls honest, by your hopes,
Come to the camp ; if you return not with me,
The sun, which rises yonder in the east, 230
Goes not more surely to his ev'ning grave
Than I to mine.

Edg. Lo, I obey your summons,
Fierce flinty warrior ! in yon beachen grove
Stands my caparison'd and ready steed ;
There on the trunk, whose living bark records
My lov'd Edwina's name, hangs up my sword,
My mailed corslet, and my plumed crest,

With all the proud apparel of the war :
 When I am furnish'd, I shall court admittance 240
 To this fair presence and implore a smile,
 As my last parting boon ; which if obtain'd,
 Nor spells, nor talismans shall be so potent
 To shield my bosom in the bleeding field,
 As the sweet magic of Edwina's eyes.

Edw. If thou hast love or pity in thy soul,
 Return, and tell the rest.

Edg. O death, to part ! [Exit.

Edw. Now, stern admonisher, I see my fate,
 And I will bear it with what grace I can ; 250
 Not lightly, as philosophers prescribe
 To others, when themselves are well at ease,
 But deeply, feelingly, as one should do,
 Whose heart by nature and by love made soft ;
 With sorrow and unkindness now is rent !

Ed. You love and you avow it—righteous heaven !
 What is there in the scope of human means,
 Which my providing foresight hath not summon'd
 To fence off this destruction ? Lost Edwina !
 Hath not thy brother, like a faithful pilot, 260
 Sounded this dang'rous coast, where rocks and shallows
 Wait for the wreck of honour's costly freight ?
 Have I not pointed to the baneful quarter,
 Whence cold and blasting disappointment blows
 Withering thy beauty's bloom ?

Edw. Thou hast, my brother,
 Thou hast done all that man could do to save me,
 But Heaven is over all.

Ed. When last we parted,
 Thou helpless orphan—what was then my caution ? 270

Edw. You caution'd me against unwary love :

You warn'd me how I listen'd, how I look'd,
 'Twas a vain warning; I had look'd and listen'd,
 And whilst I open'd my weak heart to pity,
 I let in love withal.

Ed. You let in madness.

Edw. Did you not pity? I have seen your eyes,
 Unus'd to weep, turn fountains as they gaz'd!
 Did you not love? Your very soul was Edmund's;
 I know you'll call it friendship—so did I, 280
 But find too late 'twas love.

Ed. Call it despair——

For hope it must be never; call it death.
 Sure some malignant planet rul'd thy birth,
 And thou art doom'd to nothing but disaster:
 Three nights and days thy widow'd mother travail'd
 With fruitless pangs, the fourth succeeding morn
 She blest her new-born murderer and expir'd;
 Then, as 'tis said, my father's shade did walk;
 Then on the western tower the ominous owl 290
 Scream'd at mid-day, the faithless misletoe
 From its maternal oak untwin'd its arms,
 And dropt without a blast.

Edw. No more; but strike!

Mine is the crime to be belov'd by Edmund:
 Draw forth thy sword and strike it to my heart——
 'That rebel heart, which will not be commanded:
 But, spite of death and Edwin dares to love.
 Why dost thou pause?

Ed. Strike to thy heart! O horror!

300

Not if an angel visibly descended,
 And bade me give the blow.

Edw. Wilt thou not kill me?

Ed. By heav'n, I would not harm thee to be lord
 Of sea and earth.

Edw. Then take me to thine arms,
For still thou lov'st me ; still thou art my brother.

Ed. I am thy brother still ; and hold thy love
Dearer than relicks of departed saints,
Richer than hoarded piles of worship'd gold ; 310
Come then and seek content in some calm dwelling,
Some silent convent from the world withdrawn,
Where prayer and penance make atonement sure,
Where meditation communing with Heaven
Shall sooth the rebel passions into peace,
Refine the soul and conquer love itself.

Edw. Talk not of cells and convents ; I am Edmund's.

Ed. Thou must forget the very name of Edmund.

Edw. His very name ! why, for what cause ? declare.

Ed. There is a cause, a cause approv'd by Heaven, 320
And crown'd with deathless glory : search no farther ;
This hour he parts ; return thou to thy rest—
When next we meet, thou shalt applaud and thank me.
Go, go, Edwina—nay—it must be so. [Exit.

Edw. Why then it shall be so : let him to battle ;
Tear us asunder—I can only die ;
When I am gone, his fame shall be immortal.
So when the bleak and wintry tempest rends
The mantling ivy from the worship'd sides
Of some aspiring tower, where late it hung ; 330
The stately mass, as with a sullen scorn,
From its proud height looks down upon the wreck,
And disencumber'd from its feeble guest,
Bares its broad bosom and defies the storm.

Enter EDGAR, armed as for Battle.

Edg. Alone ! O happy chance ! at thy fond bidding
Obedient I return.

Edw. Hah ! what art thou ?

Edg. Dost thou not know me ? Am I not thine Edmund ?

Edw. Away ! 'tis lost—I must forget that name.

Edg. Coin what new name thou wilt : let me be any thing,
So 'tis but what you love, I shall be happy. 341

Edw. Are these the soft habiliments of love ?
This high proud plumage, these blood-stained arms ?
Go to the mistress whom you serve, ambition ;
And talk no more of love.

Edg. By Heaven I love thee
More than the sun-burnt earth loves soft'ning showers,
More than new-ransom'd captives love the day ;
Or dying martyrs, breathing forth their souls,
The acclamations of whole hosts of angels. 350

Edw. Why then leaves Edmund what so well he loves ?

Edg. But to return more worthy of that love ;
Can I, oh tell me ! can thine Edmund sleep
In these calm haunts, whilst war's insulting shout
Fills the wide cope of heaven, and every blast,
That through this solitary forest howls,
Wafts to my ear my country's dying groans ?

Edw. If groans can move thee, why so deaf to mine ?
Mysterious youth, or now at once resolve me,
Or now for ever go ; who, and what art thou ? 360
Why does my brother wrest thee from my sight ?
And why with that stern brow am I commanded
(Vain, fruitless mandate) to forget my Edmund,
Forget thy very name and that dear hour,
When first he brought thee to these happy scenes ?
What tender charges did he then impose !
How did his tongue run over in thy praise,
Till, honouring Edmund for a brother's sake,
I soon perceiv'd I lov'd him for his own.

Edg. Oh, there is such persuasion in thy looks,
I shall forget myself and tell thee all ! 370

Edw. 'Twas then that Edmund told us thou wast sprung
From the best blood which England's isle could boast ;
He said that thou wast Edgar's nearest friend,
That with his crown thy fortunes had been lost ;
Bade us revere thee, love thee as the king,
For that so close an union knit your souls,
Edgar and thou were one.

Edg. And truth he told,
For I am Edgar : I am England's king: 380

Edw. King ! thou the king !

Edg. Be constant—I am Edgar.

Edw. [*After a pause she sinks upon her knees.*] The Heavens
confirm your right, and build your fortune
To its deserved greatness ! on my knees
I beg a blessing on you, but for pity
Mock me no more, it is not noble in you,
And tortures my poor heart.

Edg. Hear me, Edwina——

Edw. Fly me, disown me, leave me to my fate.

Edg. No, by this fond embrace I swear to live 390
For thee alone ; when I forsake Edwina,
Let me be chronicled to latest ages
For vile and false.—Remember'd in thy prayers,
As with impenetrable armour fenc'd,
Fearless I part ; fairest and best—farewell !
May each good spirit of the night and day
Watch round thee hourly !—England and Edwina ! [*Exeunt.*]

ACT II. SCENE I.

*The English Camp. The Royal Tent with the Banners of
HAROLD unfurled. Enter EDGAR and EDWIN.*

Edwin.

EDMUND, your steed is feather-footed, light
As gossamour; and you, methinks, did ride,
As you 'd o'ertake the couriers of the sky,
Hors'd on the sightless winds; the camp yet sleeps;
We have outstript the hour.

Edg. Mark, Edwin, mark,
How lovingly the strumpet winds salute
These flaunting banners of the earl of Kent:
Teach me some patience—O, ye ministring storms!
Where did you sleep, while usurpation grew 10
To this proud height?

Ed. No more—remember, sir,
You are a subject here.

Edg. King Edmund's heir,
Can he be subject to Earl Goodwyn's son?
If thou would'st teach that lesson, sluice these veins
And let out Alfred's blood.

Ed. You are too loud:
Here comes Northumberland, a fiery spirit,
Which fourscore winters have not yet extinguish'd: 20
I pray you, though he be your house's foe,
Bear yourself gently tow'rds him, 'twill be wisdom.

Enter NORTHUMBERLAND, SIFFRIC, WALTHEOF, and others.

North. The king not forth yet! Oh, it is the soul
Of discipline to harness with the sun:

Canst thou not, Siffric, call to mind the day
When with a handful of Northumbrian kerns
I foil'd the king of Scots on Tweeda's brink ?

Sif. 'Twas on Saint Jude betimes.

North. The grey-ey'd morn
Laugh'd to behold the vaunting sluggard fly, 30
As we did hollow him with hunter's cries
Back to his native wilds. Soft, who are these ?
The faction of young Edgar : said you not
These men had fled the camp—But see where comes
Mercia, the princely brother of our king.

Enter Earl of MERCIA with Attendants.

Mer. Warriors, well met : health and a happy morn !
And may the sun, which dances on your plumes,
Still with new glories gild your conquering brows !
The king not yet abroad ! still on his knees
For his dear people's sake.—How wears the day ? 40

North. Prince, till our royal leader shall come forth
There is no day : let him once sound to battle,
On piles of Norman slain we'll build him altars
High as Olympus ; in the battle's shout
We'll chaunt our morning oraisons so loud,
That heaven's high vault shall echo with the peal.

Edg. How valiant-tongu'd we are ! Heaven's favour
guard us,
And keep off the old adage !

Ed. Be more patient,
And let his humour pass.

Edg. Hang him, vain dotard,
I sicken at his folly.

Ed. See ! the king.

[*The curtain of the tent is suddenly drawn off, and King Harold appears : he comes forward.*]

Har. Nobles, all hail. O sight of joyful hope
For suffering England ! patriot band of worthies
Confederate by the holiest league on earth
To the best, dearest cause : how say you, friends—
Stand your hearts with us for immediate battle !
Do they all beat to the same martial measure,
And shall we forth at once ? 60

North. Forth ! Strike the drums ;
Seize your bright spears, my gallant countrymen,
And let us drive these hungry wolves before us
Home to their howling forests.

Har. Valiant chiefs,
You hear Northumberland renown'd in arms :
Is there amongst us one who would incline
To measures of more caution ?

Sif. My dread liege,
Well hath Northumberland advised for battle ; 70
Of friends— of fame abandon'd be the man,
Who checks the warrior's ardour and imposes
Vile coward fears beneath the mask of caution.

Ed. I must confess my reason is not caught
By empty sounds, nor can I give my voice
For rash, intemperate, and immediate battle :
The foe, dread sir, is sixty thousand strong,
By hardy warriors led and train'd to arms :
Snatch your bright spears, cries bold Northumberland,
And chase these wolves—Alas, these wolves have fangs, 80
And will not fly for words.

North. Now by my life,
Edwin, thy heart is not with England's cause.

Edg. Not with his country's cause !—Northumberland,

Wert thou as great as pagan Hercules,
And I no better than thyself, old man,
Ev'n such a wither'd, palsied thing as thou art,
Yet would I tell thee to thy teeth, 'tis false ;
As wide as lowest hell stands off from heaven,
So do thy words from truth.

90

Sif. Who talks of truth ?

Where was your truth last night, when, like a spy,
Darkling alone, and as you hoped, unseen,
You leapt the trench and fled ?

Edg. Set out the lists—

Life against life, and see if I can fly,
Thou dastardly reviler.

Har. Peace ! and hear me ;

Why hast thou left our camp ? where and with whom
Didst thou consume the night ?

100

Edg. Are there no hours,

Amidst a soldier's life, sacred to love,
To friendship, to repose ? I am no traitor—
Nor this my noble friend ; let it suffice
I come a voluntary friend to claim
The privilege of my progenitors,
And die for England.

North. Perish he who would not !

This is the friend, my liege, of out-law'd Edgar,
Of whom report prevails that he now harbours
Somewhere within this realm ; let him be question'd,

110

Har. Not for another empire. O, Northumberland,

By gentle habits let us draw men's hearts,
And bind them to us not enforcedly,
But lovingly and freely—Hark, our trumpet !
Welcome, brave Reginald—what says the Norman
To our defiance ?

Enter REGINALD.

Reg. Thus he bids me say,
To-morrow with the sun he will expect you
Army 'gainst army on the plains of Hastings. 120

Har. Hear ye this, lords? Oh turn upon the foe
Those eyes that interchange their angry fires.
Shall it be so, brave friends? What says Lord Edmund?

Edg. There is my gage: to-morrow be our witness
Who ventures fairest in his country's cause,
Edmund or Siffric.

Ed. When we're call'd to arms
For England's safety, private feuds should cease,
And every son unite in her defence.

Har. Oh, let us bring one heart to this great cause; 130
Thus banded, who shall break us? To your posts
As friends and soldiers; let dissensions die,
Learn silence of the foe, and keep good watch.
So farewell all? — Edmund! [Exit Lords.

Edg. What wills the King?

Har. Stand at my side: Would thou could'st love me,
Edmund,

As well as thou lov'st Edgar: Why dost eye me
As thou would'st measure me from heel to head?
I never did thee wrong: If thou hast sorrows,
Give them to me; I'm loaded hard with cares, 140
For I'm a King; thine is a private lot,
Thou may'st be free and happy. Gallant earl,
Wilt thou commit thy noble charge to me?
I would be private with him.

Ed. Royal sir,
The interest I have in him is thine:
Edmund remember——

Har. Follow me.

Ed. Beware.

[*Exeunt Har. and Edg.*

[*As Edw. is going out, Wal. who had waited in the back Scene, calls to him.*]

Wal. Turn, noble Edwin—look upon a friend. 150

Ed. A friend, Lord Waltheof?

Wal. Have you then forgot

How oft in early youth on Avon's banks

We wak'd the echoes with our rural sports?

Have you forgot our mutual binding oath

To royal Edgar's cause? Ev'n now my heart

True to its former fires, expanded swells

And labours with a second birth of love.

Ed. Where was your oath on that lamented day,

When Severn's streams ran purple with the blood 160

Of Edgar's murder'd friends? Where was your love,

When at the side of stern Northumberland,

You frown'd defiance at me? Art thou not

The veriest courtier that e'er pag'd the heels

Of pride-swoln majesty?

Wal. Were I the wretch,

So supple to ambition's sordid use,

So abject as thou mak'st me, what forbids

But I should seize the lucky instant, fly

To the abus'd ear of the king and tell him— 170

Ed. What would'st thou tell him?

Wal. What! that Edmund is——

But for the world I will not damn my honour:

Live Edgar but 'till Waltheof shall betray him,

And he must be immortal.

Ed. Art thou faithful?

May I believe thee? Oh, if thou betray'st him,

Hell hath not torments dire enough to plague thee.

Wal. Come, I am in thy bosom—Learn a truth ;
This young Minerva, whom our English Jove 180
Leads to his wars—Matilda—shall be Edgar's.

Ed. Come to my heart ; I do believe thee loyal
And noble as I've known thee.

Wal. Why she loves him
To fascination !

Ed. Art thou sure of that ?

Wal. Have I sight, hearing, do I live and wake ?
—Her very soul is Edmund's.

Ed. Grant she loves,
Can we be sure that he returns her love ? 190

Wal. Does the sun warm the bosom that he shines on ?
So must her beauty, Edgar : Mark my project—
The King to superstition much inclines ;
Peering in musty prophecies and fables ;
Consulting with astrologers and seers,
Divines and interpreters of dreams,
Omens and prodigies.

Ed. 'Tis ever thus
When the mind's ill at ease.

Wal. There is at hand 200
An ancient soothsayer of Scottish birth,
Duncan his name ; ev'n such a man, so white
And reverend with age, as might impose
Credulity upon the wariest—him,
By the enthusiastic monarch deem'd
Oracular, will I dispose to speak
Of Edgar and his right——

Ed. Break off ; behold
The princess comes.

Wal. Look, Edwin, what a form 210
Of pensive majesty ! Mark'd you that sigh ;

Those eyes, love's oracles? Poor stricken deer,
The shaft is in thy heart!

Ed. Let us withdraw.

[*Exeunt.*]

Enter MATILDA, and Attendants. A Guard.

Mat. Soldiers, retire; your charge extends no farther—

Sabina!

[*The Guards go off.*]

Sab. What commands, my gracious lady?

Mat. You told me on the way you had a suit;
What can my faithful handmaids ask in vain?

Sab. 'Tis for a stranger, not ourselves, we ask;
A virgin suitor of no vulgar mein,

220

But fair in speech and feature, one who bears
The port and semblance of illustrious birth,
Tho' sorrow-struck and waining with despair.

Mat. Have you denied her aught? Ah, if you have;
Or have demur'd, me and yourself you've wrong'd
And forfeited Heaven's love: What is her suit?

Sab. In these rude times protection and admission
Into our happy number.

Mat. Bring her to me.

[*Exeunt all but Sab.*]

Sabina, stay; there's pity in thine eye,

230

If this poor stranger can provoke these drops,
My griefs will drown thee quite.

Sab. Alas, what would'st thou?

Mat. What would I? be the poorest thing on earth,
Poorer than her whose miseries you weep for,
Be any thing so I were free withall:

Then might I see him, wait upon him, watch
And pay him hourly worship. On our way
As I did meet the king, and bent my knee,

As is my morning custom—why, Sabina,

240

When I discover'd standing at my side

Young Edmund's bright and blooming form before me,
 Why did my heart, as with a sudden leap,
 Spring to my trembling lips and stop my tongue,
 That would have beg'd a blessing ? Every sense
 Revolted from it's office ; my 'rapt soul
 Fled at my eyes ; I fainted, sunk, and fell.

Sab. Ah, fatal chance, that ever you should see him !

Mat. Deeper and deeper sinks the mortal shaft ;
 My bosom's peace is lost. Once I was happy ; 250
 Clear and serene my life's calm current ran,
 While scarce a breezy wish provok'd its tide ;
 Down the smooth flood the tuneful passions fell
 In easy lapse and slumber'd as they pass'd ;
 Now what a change is wrought ! O love, in age
 Thou art indeed a child, in power a god.
 How now !—What stranger's this ?

Enter EDWINA, introduced by the Ladies of MATILDA'S Train.

Sab. You have forgot,
 The maid we spoke of.

Mat. Pray you pardon me— 260
 Stranger, approach and fear not. I can see
 Thou art not us'd to ask, and yet thy looks
 Plead most enforcingly : If thou dost need
 Such shelter as these humble coverings give,
 Here in the rear of danger thou may'st dwell,
 And join thy prayers to our's.

Edw. Thanks, noble lady.

In yon' fair vale, while peace was there, I dwelt :
 One only brother cheer'd my orphan state,
 And rich in flocks and herds, serene we liv'd : 270
 Him, the support and solace of my life,
 Stern duty's iron hand hath wrested from me ;

And somewhere in this mighty camp he wars.
 What was for me deserted and forlorn ?
 With one old faithful servant forth I come,
 Led slowly on through unfrequented paths
 To her, whose fame is bruited thro' the land,
 Whose gentleness and pity climb Heaven's court,
 Like an accepted sacrifice.

Mat. No more.

280

Praise undeserv'd, what is it but reproach ?
 This maid would seem less noble than she is,
 How must I call thee, stranger ?

[*Aside.*

Edw. Athelina.

O Heavenly God of truth, be not extreme
 With thine offending creature, but accept
 Necessity my plea.

[*Aside.*

Mat. Fair Athelina,

Such welcome as these angry times allow,
 Freely thou hast : Our's is no life of ease ;
 We must awake before the morning's dawn,
 Or look to have our slumber broke to-morrow.
 When these vast armies which thou see'st shall join,
 Rending Heaven's concave with their rival shouts
 In terrible confliktion—

290

Edw. Power supreme !

Whose words can bid the gath'ring clouds disperse,
 And chain the stubborn and contentious winds,
 When they unseat the everlasting rocks
 And cast them to the sky ; wilt thou permit
 Thy creature man thus to deface thy works ?
 Or is he stronger and in less control
 Than these fierce elements ?

300

Mat. Banish complaint,

Take hope into my heart, and every thought

Drive far away, that can infect the mind
With fear's unnerved ague. 'Tis the cause,
The cause which sanctifies the warrior's zeal;
It is our country's just maternal claim
On all her sons to fight in her defence. 310

Edw. I will not whisper to the babbling winds
My ill-tim'd fears, but hush them in my breast,
And smile on sorrow, tho' my sad heart break.

Mat. Ah, am not I a woman like thyself?
Doth thy heart tremble for a brother's life,
And shall a father's plant no care in mine?
What hast thou more at stake, unless perchance
Thy flock and herds in yon' sequester'd vale,
Thy peaceful calm content outweighs a crown.

Edw. Ah, Edmund, Edmund! why did'st thou forsake me?

Mat. Whom dost thou name? 321

Edw. I pray you pardon me,
The sad remembrance of an absent friend
Drew after it a short unheeded sigh—
The last which I will utter.

Mat. Much I fear
Thou hast untold afflictions—secret griefs,
Which swell that bosom and provoke those sighs.
But, come, thy tender frame demands repose,
And these kind friends will lead thee to their tents. 330
To-morrow, virgins, we must teach our throats
A loftier strain, and to the sounding harp
With songs of victory hail the rising morn. [Exeunt.

ACT III. SCENE I.

Scene as before. Enter EDWIN and WALTHEOF.

Waltheof.

Lo, he hath dropt the curtain of his tent,
Which tokens privacy: Duncan is there;
I've arm'd the fiery zealot for the charge,
With all the stars of heaven at his command,
To rouse the sleeping conscience of the king:
That done, my turn succeeds to mount the breach
Where superstition enter'd—'whelm his soul
With Edgar's wrongs; and then 'twixt hope and fear
Fix this fair project.

Ed. Oh beware, Lord Waltheof!—10
In Edgar's veins runs the last hallow'd stream
Of Royal Alfred's blood.

Wal. What can defeat us?
Matilda's passion makes our purpose sure;
And for the king—but hark, he's coming forth— [*Exeunt.*]

DUNCAN comes hastily out of the Tent, followed by HAROLD.

Har. Stay, Duncan, stay!
Dun. Let me come forth.
Har. Oh, speak,
Oh answer me this once, prophetic seer!
Shall we go forth and conquer?20

Dun. Man of sin,
Conquer thyself, take arms against ambition,
Drive that invader from thy heart—then talk
Of setting England free.

Har. What is my sin?

Dun. And dost thou ask ? was it a trivial thing
From this fair vineyard to thrust out the heir,
And rule by spoil and rapine ?

Har. I have sinn'd ;
Yet I've not slain him ; still young Edgar lives. 30

Dun. Lives he, and dost thou reign ?—Tho' thou shouldst
bribe

Legions of holy men to weary Heaven
Early and late with never-ceasing prayers,
Vain were their suit. Now mark me—All night long
From setting to the rising sun I watch'd,
And on my aged knees put up loud prayers
And frequent, for this helpless country's sake—

Har. Heaven grant thy prayers ! say, what declare the
signs ?

Dun. Ev'n in that moment when the midnight sphere
Central was pois'd, and yesterday expir'd, 40
On the left shoulder of the northern bear
Thy natal star arose ! rayless and dim
And watery pale the horoscope appear'd,
While from the threat'ning east the hostile Moon
Push'd thee with adverse horns, red-mail'd Mars
Flam'd in his planetary house, and scoul'd
With stellar rage askaunt.

Har. Disastrous signs !
What shall I do ?

Dun. Repent ! 50

Har. With heart abash'd,
And low as to the dust I bow my head
To Heaven's rebuke and thine—What more ? O, speak !

Dun. Fight not till Edgar's found—

Har. Till Edgar's found ?
But when and where ?—proceed,

Dun. Thou hast a daughter—
I can no more—Who follows shall expound ;
What he shall counsel, that pursue and prosper ! [*Exit Dun.*

Har. ' Fight not till Edgar's found ! '—So much is
perfect : 60

' Thou hast a daughter '—there the prophet ceas'd :
' Who follows shall expound '—Thus I am left !
This is thy fruit, ambition ; thus it seems
Possessions by ill deeds obtain'd, by worse
Must be upheld or lost ; such league and concord
Things vicious hold, that trespassing in one,
We must offend in all ; woe then to him,
Who from his neighbour's heap purloins a grain,
Yea but one grain ; with such swift consequence
Crime follows crime, that none shall dare to say, 70
This and no more !

Enter WALTHEOF unobserved by HAROLD.

Wal. Thus Israel's monarch stood.
With eyes so wedded to the pensive earth,
When at the fable's close his conscience smote him,
While the stern messenger of God pronounc'd,
Thou art the man.

Har. Waltheof !

Wal. What would my liege ?

Har. Approach, in truth thou 'rt welcome. I have seen
The old divining hermit, whom we met 20
Upon the eve of Standford's bloody day,
When Halfager with his Norwegian bands,
And traitrous Tosti fell beneath our swords.

Wal. And gives he victory still ?

Har. Atonement now

Is all his theme, and penitence for wrongs
To Edgar done.

Wal. Hence with such idle dreamers !
What are the visions of the cloyster'd monk,
The hermit's phrenzy, or the coward calls
Of black'ning conscience to ambition's charms ?

90

Har. Ambition's charms ! Accursed be the hour
When first they caught my weak unwary heart !
Full in my view the stately phantom stood,
Her nature charm'd me, and the dazzling height
Fir'd my young blood ! I sprung to her embrace ;
The distance vanish'd, and the steep ascent
Sunk at the touch ; she with dissembling smiles
And meretricious glances met my joys ;
Upon my head she plac'd a kingly crown ;
But in the moment drew a poniard forth,
And plung'd it in my heart.

100

Wal. Ah ! who shall envy
Another's greatness : call another blest,
When thus a king complains ?

Har. I tell thee, Waltheof,
Had I the world at will, I 'd yield it up
To be at peace with Heaven.

Wal. Alas, my liege !
Are there no gentler terms of peace with Heaven ?
Methinks—but I offend perhaps, and press
On too high matters——

110

Har. I conjure thee speak :
My doom is on thy lips : 'tis thou alone
That can expound my fate.

Wal. Wouldst thou atone
For wrongs to Edgar done, and purge thy soul
For its contracted guilt—thou hast——

Har. Proceed——

Nor rack me with suspense.

120

Wal. Thou hast a daughter——

Har. What follows?—there the prophet ceas'd—proceed.

Wal. And need I add the rest? Edgar—Matilda——

How those soft names unite! there's music in them,

Might make the angriest star in heaven propitious.

Har. Join them? espouse them?—Is it thus you counsel?

Wal. If thus it please thee; think it else a sound,
Which dies and is forgot.

Har. Come to my bosom;

Thy voice to me is as the voice of Heaven:

130

It shall be so; Edgar shall wed Matilda;

My darling child sure will obey and bless me.

Men's hearts shall be mine own; these factious lords

Will all come in——

Wal. Duncan shall chide no more——

Har. My country shall be sav'd—but where is Edgar?

Now by the virgin mother of our lord,

A bow shall not be bent against the foe,

Nor a stone vollied from the slinger's arm

'Till Edgar shall be found.

140

Wal. Then ere the star

Of evening shall arise, expect him here.

Har. May I believe thee?

Wal. If I bring him not,

Let my head answer.

Har. I am whole again:

Now I have divination on my side;

Fight not, the prophet cried, 'till Edgar's found.

Lo! he is found, I may both fight and conquer.

Q Waltheof, I do surely think that God

150

To wise and holy men sometimes reveals

A portion of his councils : Here we part——
 I to Matilda—you in search of Edgar ;
 Whom if you bring, I live but to reward you.

[Exit.

Wal. Thus do I ever make all men my own,
 And still conforming to these changeful times,
 Like ancient Janus double-fac'd, at once
 Follow the setting—meet the rising sun.

Enter EDWIN.

Welcome, brave lord, rais'd by the fairest hand
 In England's isle your prince ascends the throne ; 160
 Harold by Duncan's holy art prepar'd
 With greedy joy adopts the royal youth.

Ed. Thanks, powerful superstition ; this atones
 For all the mischief thou hast wrought on earth !

Wal. Now in this awful interim whilst dread
 And trembling expectation hangs on all.
 O, let us bring the light of England forth !
 So shines the day-star out, after rude storms
 Have shook the palsied night, and high in air
 Hangs forth his glittering lamp to cheer the world, 170
 At sight whereof the guilty waves subside,
 And the vexed spirits of the deep disperse.

Ed. Would'st thou disclose the prince ?

Wal. Else all is lost :
 Vain is our hopes, our reconcilment void,
 The battle's lost, and England is no more.

Ed. Let me reflect—Suppose that I reveal'd
 His passion for Edwina——

[Aside.

Wal. Doubt not, Edwin,
 Nor for an empty scruple cast away 180
 The sacred moments, upon which depends
 All that is dear, our king's, our country's fate,

Fame, virtue, freedom, all that we esteem
Beneath the skies, all we expect above.

Ed. Go. To thy charge, O Waltheof, I commit
The fate of Edgar and of England : Go !
Yet stay—resolve me, hast thou weigh'd the danger ?
Hast thou with wary eye look'd thro' the heart
Of this ambitious man ? Art thou right—sure
There 's no dissimulation lurking there ?
Swear to me this, as thou hast hope in heaven,
And I will yield the prince.

190

Wal. So Heaven to me
It's loving mercy deal, as I believe
In very truth there 's not on earth that thing
Of Harold so desir'd, as this alliance.

Ed. Go then ere I recall the word, begone !
Tell the usurper—but thy own discretion
Will tutor thee more wisely.—Hence ! 'tis past. [*Exit Wal.*

Enter EDGAR hastily.

Edg. Edwin, thou 'st been conferring with lord Waltheof ;
That man hath eyes which penetrate the heart ;
And he of all our English nobles here
Knows me for Edgar ; make him then thine own ;
Print on his lips the seal of holy faith,
Keep my name sacred as heaven's own records
Lock'd in thy breast.

201

Ed. Prince, dost thou love thy country ?
Would'st thou preserve her matrons from dishonour,
Her youth from slavish bonds, and chase the spoilers
From her affrighted shores ?

210

Edg. Would I !—just Heaven
Thou knowst what I have done, and thou canst tell
What more that spirit thou hast given would do !

Ed. Nay, 'tis no irksome task. No toil, no danger,
But joy, and love, and glory crown the deed.

Edg. No more, but to the point.

Ed. In one plain word

Thus then I open all thy fate—Matilda!—

Nay, start not, sir—thy tried and loving servant,

Edwin, thy ever-faithful creature tells thee

220

'That thou must wed Matilda.

Edg. Hah! must wed!

What if I love her not?

Ed. All men must love her.

Edg. Must wed! must love! Away! Did the great
master

Put in thy hands those fine and secret springs,

Which guide the various movements of the soul?

Rouse it to hate, or melt it into love?

No: there is that in every human breast,

Which Heaven made free and tyrants cannot reach.

230

Ed. Wilt thou not meet the hand that lifts thee up

From low despair, and seats thee on a throne?

Edg. Perish ambition! perish every hope

Rather than this should be!

Ed. Go then, ye sons

Of freedom, go! your sacred birthright sell

To Norman masters; hence like scatter'd sheep

Without a shepherd—for there's none to watch

But hirelings; he, the master of the flock,

Shrinks from his duty, and forsakes the fold.

240

Edg. Edwin, this patriot rage becomes thee well;

But let me glory in my choice, the crown—

Nay, was it mine, the world would be Edwina's:

And know, I'd rather be the roving kern,

That prints Arabia's sands with burning feet,

And send my heart amidst the tawny tribes,
To fix where love should point, than be a king
To wed as sordid policy prescribes.

[*Exit.*

Ed. [Alone.] Death to my hopes, he has no soul for
empire.

Heavens ! that a man born for a nation's glory, 250
Can sell his birthright at so vile a price,
For such a toy as beauty !—O, Edwina !
(And must I call thee sister ?) fatal syren,
Thou hast done this : if Waltheof sees the king
Edgar is lost : that, that must be prevented
With my best speed, for oh ! I love him still,
Still my heart tells me I would die to save him. [*Exit.*

Enter MATILDA and EDWINA.

Mat. A little farther yet—I see you wonder
Why I have brought you to this place apart :
It is because a sympathy of soul 260
Draws and unites me to you ; 'tis because
There sits a weeping cherub in your eyes,
That silently demands why I am sad,
And I must speak to it : The worldly-wise,
Who slowly climb by cold degrees to friendship,
Such are my scorn ; at sight of Athelina
Affection from my breast sprung forth at once
Mature as Pallas from the brain of Jove.

Edw. Your bounty, like the sun, warms where it shines,
And what it feels, inspires. 270

Mat. O, Athelina !
I am ordain'd to misery, soul-enslav'd
And sentenc'd sore against the heart's protest
To wed and be a wretch.

Edw. And who compels

Matilda ! victim-like, what tyrant drags thee
As to a pagan altar ; there to offer
Constrain'd obeisance, and put on the vow
As slaves do fetters with an aching heart ?

Mat. So wills my father ; never till this hour 280
Did I behold him so possess'd with passion,
So terrible in wrath.

Edw. O, shame to nature !
And what is he 'mongst Europe's kings so great,
That you of force must wed ?

Mat. Nor great is he,
Nor number'd amongst Europe's kings, but one,
Of whose inheritance there is not left,
Save the free air he breaths, and one faint spark
Of sickly hope, that visits his sad heart
To rack 't with recollection of lost right.

Edw. What do I hear?

Mat. Nay thou canst never guess him ;
The last, the lowest in thy thoughts—

Edw. Indeed !

Mat. To sum up my afflictions in a word,
'Tis Edgar Atheling.

Edw. Heavens grace forbid it !
Have they discover'd him ?

Mat. Who! what 's discover'd? 300

Edw. Perish the meddling politic contriver,
Who set this mischief going!—Oh, if Edgar—

Mat. Who talks, who thinks of Edgar? Thou'rt possest.

Edw. Who can be patient and yet hear such things?
The king commands! what then? will he command
The soul and its affections? Dearest lady,
Your father though he be, is he so great
As to give law to nature?

Mat. I am fixt :

Therefore be patient ? had he ask'd my life, 310
I would obey and grant it ; but my heart
That is another's—I cannot bestow
What I do not possess.

Edw. Then you 'll not wed—

Mat. To Edgar never, be assur'd of that.

Edw. Oh, 'tis a deed will chronicle your name
In fame's eternal records ; you disdain
To make a lying contract with your lips
And swerve with your affections ; you are fixt ;
You love another : oh, may he you love— 320
Kneeling I make it my most ardent prayer,
Be your reward and glory ; live for you,
And you alone ; and may you meet delights,
Pure as your virtue, lasting as your truth !

Mat. Kind Athelina, thanks : bear with my weakness,
And let me tell thee all my love's fond story
From the first hour I met him ; the bright sun,
Smote on his helm, which shot a fiery gleam,
That dazzled all the plain ; before his troop,
Arm'd at all points. upon a snow-white steed 330
Graceful he rode ; invention never yok'd
A fairer courser to Apollo's car,
When with the zephyrs and the rosy hours
Through heaven's bright portal he ascends the east,
And on his beamy forehead brings the morn.

Edw. A snow-white steed ! New terrors strike my soul.

[*Aside.*

Mat. At sight of me he stopt, and from his steed
Active and feathery-light he leapt to earth.

Edw. Give me your pardon ; serves he in this camp ?

Mat. Yes, but report prevails, he left the camp 340
Last night o' th' sudden ; and this morn, 'tis said,

Being return'd, in presence of the king
Some proud high-stomach'd lords did sharply urge
And whet him to much rage ; him and his friend
Earl Edwin.—

Edw. Hah ! 'tis he.

[*Aside.*

Mat. Alas, what shakes you !
You start and tremble, and your up-cast eyes
Cling to Heaven's throne : know you the youth I speak of ?

Edw. As yet you have not told his name.

350

Mat. 'Tis Edmund.

Edw. I had a friend and Edmuud was his name,
But now that name's no more !

Mat. You had a friend—

I knew it, Athelina ; yes I saw,
I saw your sorrows and I lov'd you for them ;
Your friend is now no more—Alas ! To-morrow
May lay my Edmund low as your's ; but I,
I shall not live, as thou hast liv'd, to tell it.
Oh, were he Edgar, had he Edgar's birth,
My young, unknown, untitled, blooming rustic !
Did his blood flow—but what of that ? My father
Reigns though a subject born, and so shall Edmund,
If virtue hath an interest in heaven ;
And England's throne out-stands to-morrow's storm.

360

Edw. Indeed !

Mat. No power can stir me.

Edw. What if Edmund,

What if the youth you love perchance hath made
Some humbler swain his choice—

370

Mat. Perish the thought,

It brings distraction with it : I command you
Not to suppose he can prefer another ;
I took you for my comforter, and lo
You fix a scorpion to my breast.

Edw. A scorpion !

I pray you be not angry ; I would kneel
And beg a blessing for you ; but, alas !
Leaden affliction lies so heavy on me,
Imagination cannot stretch a wing
To raise me from the dust.

380

Mat. Nay, now you melt me ;
Pr'ythee go in, good maid, I am right sorry
I spake so harshly to you : do not weep,
For my sake do not—yet 'tis ever thus,
When the fond thought of some departed friend
Bursts unawares from memory's gushing font,
And in a flood of sorrows 'whelms the soul.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT IV. SCENE I.

Enter EDWIN and WALTHEOF.

Edwin.

LORD Waltheof, if thou hast not yet disclos'd
The royal youth, forbear, I do revoke
The word I gave thee.—

Wal. Why, on what pretence ?

Ed. Edgar commands it ; he disclaims ambition,
And will not wed Matilda.

Wal. Will not wed !—

Edgar, the most forlorn, lost thing on earth,
Not wed Matilda ! Strengthen my belief,
Some wonder working power ! It cannot be.

10

Ed. By Heaven that knows my heart, I have assail'd him
With words, tears, menaces, entreaties, prayers ;
But all, all fruitless ; he is fixt.

Wal. For shame !

Some little grov'ling passion lurks about him,
Some vulgar village wench, whose ruddy health
And rustic manners fit his narrow soul,
And kindle something he mistakes for love.

Ed. Restrain yourself, my lord, your rage transports you.
And yet to show I scorn a mean disguise, 20
I own, in bitterness of soul I own it,
Your charge in part is true ; there is a maid,
But not of low degree, whom Edgar loves,
Fatally loves, but not of rustic manners,
Or name ignoble.

Wal. Whosoe'er she be,
Evil betide her beauty ! she hath poison'd
The dearest hopes of a most blessed creature ;
Accursed as she is, she hath undone
The happiness of one, with whom compar'd 30
She were an æthiop.

Ed. Peace, unholy railer,
You know not whom you curse—she is my sister.

Wal. Thy sister ! Ah, is this well done, my lord ?
Thus am I us'd ? thus like your basest lacquey,
Call'd and recall'd and fool'd at pleasure ? death !
I stand for Harold ; him I serve ; if Edgar
Fondly prefers thy sister to the crown
Of England and Matilda, be it so ;
Let Edgar so declare it to the king, 40
I shall fulfil my promise.

Ed. How, betrayer !
You pass no more this way but through my guard.
You stand for Harold, and for justice I, [*Draws his sword.*]
For suffering innocence, for truth and Edgar.

Wal. No more ; put up your sword ; the king advances ;
Thus to be found were death to both. [*Exit.*]

Ed. Away!

It is my cause that conquers, not my sword.

[*Exit.*

Enter HAROLD, followed by EDGAR.

Har. Now if indeed thou art that loving friend 50
Of Edgar Atheling, which same reports thee,
Lend me thy patient ear. Thou'rt not to learn,
How, when his grandsire good king Edmund died,
Our English nobles put him from his right:
And me a subject born, earl Goodwyn's son,
Call'd to the vacant throne; so call'd, of force
Obey'd I them, and by a king's best title,
My subjects free election, took the crown.

Edg. And took you peace withal and fair content 60
And conscious rectitude? You took the crown!
So would not I, though it had brought dominion
Wide as the world. Have you sweet sleep at nights?
Do no ill-omen'd visions haunt your couch;
And smile the eyelids of the morn upon you,
When you salute the light?

Har. Urge me no farther:
I see thou'rt noble, and that manly plainness,
Which some would shrink from, knits me closer to thee:
Nay I will own thou hast call'd up a thought,
Which like unwieldy armour weighs me down. 70
I do perceive shame and remorse are handmaids,
That wait on guilt as darkness on the night.

Edg. Methinks there needs no oracle for this;
To tell me man is cruel, false, ambitious,
Full of gross appetency and unjust,
Is to say man is man—a general truth,
To which your meanest centinel shall witness
As amply as myself; call in your camp,

Our conference needs no privacy ; you say
Heaven goads the guilty breast, and well you say, 80
For goad it shall, or Heaven must not be Heaven.

Har. Give me thy patience : what thou yet hast heard,
Think but the prelude to more weighty matter.
I have a daughter—need I call her fair,
Virtuous and full of grace?—my realm's sole heiress.
Her, in respect of his descended right,
Though fortune-wreck'd and bankrupt ev'n in hope,
Edgar shall wed.

Edg. Shall wed ?

Har. Hah ! dost thou pause ? 90

Edg. No, if affection moves at thy command,
And love must follow where ambition points,
Edgar shall wed Matilda——

Har. This to me ?

Edg. But if love owns no law but of the heart ;
And if perchance some humbler maid hath drawn
Such vows from Edgar's lips, as honour frames
And fond believing innocence admits,
Then——

Har. What then ? 100

Edg. Not upon the peopled earth,
No, nor above the clouds resides that power,
Can wrench the conscious witness from his heart,
And say to Edgar he shall wed Matilda.

Har. What ! shall a needy outlaw talk of love ?
A beggar plead affections and reject
Her, to whom Europe's kings have knelt in vain ?

Edg. Yes, for since beggars have aspired to crowns,
Kings have declin'd to beggars.

Har. Hence, audacious, 110
Nor feign for Edgar ; what were Edgar present
And known, he dare not for his life avow.

Edg. Know then 'tis Edgar speaks, 'tis Atheling
Rejects your offer'd terms; with scorn rejects them.

Har. Thou Edgar!

Edg. I am Edgar.

Har. Guards!—arrest him.

[*Guards advance.*]

Yet stay; a moment's pause, let me be calm;
Collect thy scatter'd thoughts; we yet are friends.

Edg. No, when I league with guilt and yield to fear 120
What honour should withhold, heaven shall meet hell,
Things the most fierce and opposite in nature
Shall start from their extremes and band together.
Fly to thy guards, defenceless and embay'd.
With only truth and justice on my side,
Both naked, both unarm'd, I do defy thee.

Har. Dost thou defy me? take back thy defiance,
With death to better it.

[*Gives a signal for the guards to arrest him.*]

Enter MATILDA hastily.

Mat. Health to my father!

Why dart thine eyes such angry lightnings forth? 130
Why stand these guards like hounds upon the slip?
Is this their victim? ah! can he offend?
Never look'd guilt like him; he errs perhaps
And with too bold a speech affronts the ear
Of majesty; a stranger is not bound
To all a subject's forms; let me prevail;
Send him aside and hear thy daughter speak.

Har. My daughter shall be heard; is there a thing
I ever yet denied thee? Lead him off, 140
And wait our pleasure.—Hah! that look hath language.

[*The Guard leads off Edgar: Matilda looks tenderly at him.*]

Matilada, know'st thou him thou dost survey
With such fond scrutiny ?

Mat. You bade me know him,
Protect and cherish ; by his youthful graces
Conquer'd yourself, you turn'd them upon me :
And now what cause, alas ! provokes this change ?

Har. Thou art the cause ; 't is for thy sake he dies.

Mat. Die for my sake ! Not if his death could add
Myriads of years to my extended life,
And every year bring myriads of delights. 150

Har. These are impassion'd words : alas, my child,
If thou dost love this youth——

Mat. Thou wilt destroy him ;
It is the savage policy of kings.

Har. Thou lov'st him then—confess.

Mat. To desperation—to death.

Har. Then Heaven cannot afflict thee deeper.

Mat. I know it, but your daughter, sir, can die :
I speak for nature ; mine is not a heart,
That can transfer affection ; tear him hence, 160
You tear life too—there is no room for Edgar.

Har. Say'st thou for Edgar ? He, that youth is Edgar.

[*She is falling, and Har. catches her in his arms.*]

Mat. [*After a pause.*] Save me, support me : O, my much-
loved father !

If he, that youth be Edgar, would'st thou kill
Him that shall be my husband ?

Har. What but killing
Merits that monster, who rejects Matilda ?

Mat. Rejects Matilda ! Am I then rejected ?
Oh that some friend had plung'd a dagger here,
Ere I had met this moment ! 170

Har. Nay, be patient.

Mat. Let me behold him and I will be patient.
Was thine ear fearful? Did no wrongs provoke him?
I found thee high in wrath, he too was angry,
He was, he was; and spake he knew not what.

Har. Grant Heav'n he did! I am no practised suitor,
And undeserv'd misfortune makes men proud.
Hoe, guards!—produce the youth you have in charge.
May he who arm'd thine eyes, inspire thy lips! 179
See where he comes—— [Exit.

Enter EDGAR, guarded.

Mat. Prince, (so I now must call you)
If, while it pleas'd you to assume the name
And simple stile of a plain Scottish knight,
Friendship for Edmund caus'd me to omit
What Edgar's high pretensions might have claim'd,
I shall expect your pardon.

Edg. Take my thanks,
For they are much thy due.

Mat. Nay, I am told
You are too proud to be Matilda's debtor, 190
Crowns, by her hand presented, you reject
And scorn the encumber'd boon: vindictive Edgar,
Is it your sport to steal away our hearts,
Like heathen Jove, beneath a borrow'd form,
Then re-assume the god, ascend your skies,
And leave the slighted maid to die with weeping?

Edg. What shall I say? that I disclaim ambition?
That long estrang'd and exil'd from my realm,
My heart forgets its home and draws no sighs,
Which point to England and my native right? 200
Or with an eye of cold philosophy
Shall I affect to view that radiant form,

And not confess its charms ? I feel their power,
But cannot give that heart which is another's.

Mat. Another's ! where, in what proud realm is found
She, from whose sight, diminish'd rivals shrink,
And leave the choice of all mankind to her ?

Edg. In rural silence dwells the maid I love,
With her in some lone corner of your isle,
Far from ambition's walk, let me reside, 210
Nor shake the quiet of Matilda's soul.

Mat. Sure of all forms, which cruelty assumes,
Humility can most insult mankind ;
Away ! nor cheat me with these fairy scenes ;
There is no beauty in our isle for Edgar,
No soft sequester'd maid, no truth, no love,
Save what this fond rejected heart contains.

Edg. Thus urg'd, 't were meanness to withhold the truth :
In Hackley's shades a Sylvan goddess holds
Her lonely haunts ; Edwina is her name ; 220
Earl Edwin's sister——

Mat. Take her, and be still
That abject thing thou art ; take Edwin's sister,
A subject beauty fits a subject's choice.
Go to my father, tell him thou hast pierc'd
His daughter's heart, and give him stab for stab :
Away, away ! thou hast thy full revenge.

Edg. Revenge ! my heart disclaims it : O, Matilda !
My prayers—I can no more—farewell for ever ! [Exit.

As he parts from MATILDA—Enter EDWINA.

Edw. 'Tis Edgar !—Hah ! he parts and sees me not. 230

Mat. Stay, Athelina, turn, beloved maid,
Turn from that monster thine abhorrent eyes ;
Approach and save me !

Edw. What afflicts Matilda ?

Mat. And is there need of words ? break, break, my heart !
Open thou prison-house of the soul, dissolve
And give a wretched captive its release !

Edw. Be calm.

Mat. As death. Why look'd you on that youth ?

Edw. I look'd not on his face.

240

Mat. And if thou hadst,
If thou hadst look'd, thou would'st have lov'd like me,
And like me been a wretch !

Edw. Alas, I pity thee.

Mat. Then thou hast lov'd, for love will teach thee pity.
Could'st thou believe it, he, (O, heaven !) that Edmund
Whose very name's a lye ; that Edgar Atheling
For Edwin's sister slights, rejects Matilda ;
A princess for a clown ; me for Edwina !
Strike her smooth form all o'er with lep'rous blanes,
Ye sprites, which magic incantations charm !
Shake her with palsied ugliness, ye demons,
And so present her to her lover's arms
To kill him with the touch.—O, Athelina,
If thou dost love me join and aid the curse !

250

Edw. Shall I curse her, who never hath offended ?

Mat. Turn then on him thy deepest, direst curse ;
Call up the damn'd, and darken heaven with spells.

Edw. Mercy forbid !

Mat. No mercy, but revenge :
Give me revenge. He dies.

260

Edw. Ah take my life :
Lo, at thy feet a wretched virgin kneels
And prays for mercy.

Mat. Hence ! you'll anger me.

Edw. I would I could : turn thy revenge on me ;
But spare my Edgar's life.

Mat. Thy Edgar say'st thou!
Who and what art thou?—Speak.

Edw. I am Edwina.

270

Mat. What do I hear? thou art——

Edw. I am Edwina:

Here is that bosom thou would'st plant with sores
And spotted leprosy, that fatal form,
Which thou would'st rouse the demons up from hell,
To strike with palsied ugliness; behold!—
I am the wretch whom thou didst call to aid
Thy curse on Edgar; mark how I will curse him.——

O all ye saints and angels, every spirit
Who wing'st this nether air with pinions dipt
In heaven's ethereal dew, make him your care,
And, gathering o'er his head your plumed band,
From a celestial canopy above him
To fence off this destroyer.

[Kneeling.

250

Mat. Peace, deceiver:

Thy prayers are vain; he dies this moment.—— [Going.

Edw. Stay!

Tho' not in pity, yet in honour hear me:
I ask no mercy; prayers indeed are vain;
Edwina pleads not ev'n for Edgar's life:
For if when I, the fatal cause of all,
Lie at thy feet a bloody breathless corse,
Thy rage should still demand his guiltless life,
Who shall oppose it? All that I shall do,
All that I can, is thus—to die for Edgar.

299

[Offers to kill herself but is prevented by Matilda.

Mat. Stop thy rash hand; thou shalt not die. This courage
Dazzles my rage; I stiffen with surprise;
Thy presence, like the fascinating eye
Of the fixt basilisk, takes motion from me
And roots me in the earth——

300

Edw. What shall I say ?

I own thee wretched and myself the cause :
But do not let remorseless fury rend
The god from out thine heart, which Nature's hand
Set up, as in a shrine of human kindness,
That misery like mine may find a shelter.

Mat. No more ; I once had pity ; the poor bird,
Which kills herself to feed her gaping brood,
Was not more pitiful ; but it is past ;
The wolf hath slain the lamb ; bloody revenge 310
Hath thrust out all remorse—I must have vengeance.

Edw. Take it ; 'tis in thine hand—Take full revenge :
Thou hast a dagger, strike to Edgar's heart ;
Lay his lov'd form a breathless corse before thee,
And sate thy thirst for vengeance.—Hah ! 'tis past—
Heaven opens in thine eyes.

Mat. 'Tis in mine heart ;
I feel its breath, like dew, descend upon me ;
Amidst the whirl of passion mercy sits,
And whispers patience in a voice so charming, 320
To hear is to obey—Thy Edgar lives.

Edw. Lives he ? May angels waft the word to heaven,
And bring a blessing thence !

Mat. Stay not to thank me,
Bear from my sight that too-engaging form :
Leave me to my afflictions, they'll stay with me,
And be my close companions—Fare thee well !

Edw. Farewell, thou suffering virtue ! Oh, remember,
Remember Edgar— [Exit. 330

Mat. Whither was I sinking
When this bright deed restor'd me ! So the wretch
With felon steps, on murderous act intent,
Steals on the sleeping night ; when if at once

Launch'd from sulphureous clouds the vollied fire
 Quick-glancing bursts upon his ruffian head
 With dazzling bright suffusion, horror-seiz'd,
 Trembling, aghast he starts, lets fall the knife
 Ev'n at the victim's throat and flies—as I do.

[Exit.]

ACT V. SCENE I.

HAROLD is discovered in his Tent before break of Day; the Guards in various Attitudes resting on their Arms: he rises from his Couch and advances.

Harold.

WHEN will this night have end? Arise, break forth;
 I'm weary of invoking thee, O sun!
 Lo, in yon red'ning cloud I see thee mount;
 Not as thou'rt wont with odour-breathing gales,
 Serene and marshall'd by the dancing hours
 Up to the laughing east; but warrior-like
 With rattling quiver and loud stormy march
 And bloody ensigns by the furies rear'd
 Aloft and floating in the flecker'd sky:
 So shall the day be suited to it's deeds. [A trumpet.
 Stand to your arms there, soldiers! Up, awake! II
 [The Guards rise.]

Enter Earl of MERCIA.

Mer. Hail to my king and brother! on my knee I beg a boon.

Har. What is it, gallant Mercia?

Mer. The leading of the Kentishmen.

Har. 'Tis thine:

Draw the firm phalanx forth ; 'tis thine to guide
The thunder of the war : there be thy post.

Farewell ! The word is victory or death. [Exit Mer.

[He speaks to one of the Guard.

Come hither, soldier ! haste thou to Lord Reginald, 20

Bid him to plant his bowmen in the copse,

Which flanks the Norman camp ; he knows the place ;

Thence as our foes advance with level front

And regulated files, he may perplex

And gall their battle.—Take this ensign, soldier,

In Standford's fight I saw thee bravely win it,

Defend it now as bravely.

Sol. With my life.

[Exit Soldier.

Enter WALTHER.

Wal. Health and a happy morn to England's king !
Would Heaven, that all our warriors like their chief 30
Had thus outstript the sun !

Har. Where is the promise,
With which so high you fed my pamper'd hope ?
Edgar rejects my suit : no power can move him.

Wal. Alas, you are too mild.

Har. He's deaf to reason.

Wal. Be deaf to him, O Heaven, when he does kneel
And cry for mercy ! Put your terrors forth,
My life upon 't he yields. 39

Har. Set him before us.

[Exit Wal.

Enter EDGAR, guarded.

Edg. Your messenger conven'd me to your tent ;
Lo, I expect your pleasure.

Har. Mark me then,

While to thy free election I hold up

Two different mirrors : in the one you see
The fair presentment of a kingly crown,
Where love and beauty weave the nuptial knot,
That binds it to thy brow ; in plainer terms,
My daughter and my empire wait thy choice.

Edg. I have a vow noted in heaven's own volume, 50
Where saints have witness'd it.

Har. Oh, seize the moment !

If you espouse my daughter I go forth
To certain conquest : from my soul I think
That England's fate now hangs on thy resolve.
Heal then the breaches of the land, my son,
And make us all one heart. Come then, ye nations,
And shroud old Ocean with your hostile sails ;
By her own sons defended and belov'd,
England shall stand unshaken and secure, 60
And only fall, when time itself expires.

Edg. Bid me go forth ; conduct me to the charge :
Plant me upon the last, forlornest hope,
Where the fight burns, where the mad furies toss
Their flaming torches, and wide-wasting death
Up to the hilt in blood, with giant stroke
Widows the nations : thither let me go
To fight, to fall ; but never dare to hope
Tho' you 'd a Seraph's eloquence to tempt,
A Seraph's truth to vouch for your prediction, 70
That I would yield my bosom to disgrace,
Cancel the vow which I have given Edwina,
And save my country at my soul's expence.

Har. Then know, obdurate——

Edg. What ?

Har. My country calls ; [Trumpets sound a charge.
'Tis her last awful invocation ; hark !

The altar burns ; a royal lady waits,
And this her bridal dower : receive it, prince :

[*He tenders the Crown to Edgar.*]

What can a king give more ? What has a father
More dear to offer than his only child ? 80

Edg. Forbear ; 'tis mockery when the soul is fixt.

Har. Then thou art lost—Oh yet preserve thy country !

Edg. My honour and my oath——

Har. Thy life——

Edg. My love.

Har. Die, then ! What, ho ! my guards. Strike off his
head.

*MATILDA enters hastily, and interposes herself between EDGAR
and the Guards, as they are advancing to seize him.*

Mat. Strike off his head ! By him who made the heavens,
Whose great primæval interdiction cries
Thro' all creation's round ' thou shalt not kill,' 90
I do adjure you, stop ! [*Guards fall back.*]

Har. What frenzy moves thee ?

Mat. Or spare him, or expect to see me fall
And dash my desperate brains. Upon my knees,
Father, I do beseech thee, grant him life.

Enter NORTHUMBERLAND, SIFFRIC, and other Chiefs.

North. To horse, dread sir ; brace on your beaver strait,
Caparison with speed, and meet the sun,
Who thron'd and beaming on the upland edge,
Stands in his fiery wane with glowing wheels
And panting coursers to behold a scene, 100
Worth his diurnal round.

Har. Warriors, lead on !

Tho' hell assumes her thousand hideous shapes,
 Phantoms and fiends and fierce anatomies
 To shake me from my course ; tho' Duncan cross me,
 With auguries and spells ; tho' this proud youth,
 Bid sharp vexation with its wolfish fangs
 Harrow my heart, in me is no delay.
 For thee, my child, whose intercession turns
 Yet once again from this devoted head 110
 The uplifted hand of death, take, since thou wilt,
 The thankless life, thou mak'st so much thy care ;
 And now farewell ! [Embracing Matilda.

Mat. The god of battle guide thee !

I will not shame thee with a tear : farewell !

Har. Come forth, bright sword ; hence, nature, from my
 heart :

Now take me, England ; I am all thine own.

[Exit with his Train.

Mat. Go, ye brave English ; go, as ye are wont,
 To glorious conquest ! Oh, remember, friends,
 Ye strike for us, for freedom, for your country. 120
 Angels of victory surround your host
 And fight upon your side ! Transporting sounds !

[A distant shout.

With joyful shoutings they salute their king,
 And strike their shields in token of applause.

Edgar !

[Turning from the side scene to Edgar.

Edg. Matilda ! Arm me with a sword ;

Or, like the decii, self-devoted thus

I'll rush upon the foe.

Mat. Yet ere the shock

Of battle severs us, perchance, for ever, 130

Resolve me, had it been my lot to meet thee,

With free affections and a vacant heart,

Could'st thou have deign'd to cast away a thought
On lost Matilda? Ah, could'st thou have lov'd her?

Edg. Born to each grace, with every virtue blest!
How can Matilda ask of Edgar this?

Sure I were lost to every manly feeling,
If honour'd thus, I should forbear to hold,
Whilst memory lives, thy image present here,
And cherish it with gratitude, with love! 140

Mat. It is enough: Hear, angels, and record it!
Now take this sword; if in yon bleeding ranks
You meet the king, or fainting with his wounds,
Or press'd with numbers, think he had a daughter,
And save her father, as she rescued thee. [*Mat. is going.*]

Edg. Ev'n to the teeth of death I will obey thee.
Yet stay! one word—'Tis to exact from virtue
More than frail nature warrants; yet thy soul
Is large? Oh, say, wilt thou protect Edwina?

Mat. Whilst I have life. 150

Edg. Then thou art truly great.

Mat. What! know'st thou not Edwina is my guest?

Edg. Edwina here! thy guest!

Mat. One tent contains us:
Beneath a borrow'd name (oh, let the truth
Henceforth be sacred!) she besought protection;
I took her, laid her nearest to my heart,
And fed her with it's best, it's dearest hopes—
But hark! the battle joins—Farewell, for ever! [*Exit.*]

[*A general Charge.*]

Edg. Live, live and save Edwina! Hark, they shout!
There's victory in the sound. O day and night! 161
They stop, they turn. Behold, the Normans fly;
I see bright glory flaming in the van;
Tiptoe she stands in skiey-tinctur'd stile,

Her head high-rear'd and pointing to the skies,
With pinions bent for flight: Stay, godlike vision,
And let me fly to snatch—Edwina!

Enter EDWINA.

[As he is hastening out Edwina meets him.]

Edw. Edgar!

And do we live to meet? Oh, snatch the moment, 170
And save thyself and me! Whence this impatience?
Why that disorder'd rolling of thine eye?
What ails thee, prince?

Edg. And can'st thou ask?—Behold!

Edw. O, horrible! a scene of death—

Edg. Of glory?

Of fame immortal, of triumphant rapture—
And would'st thou hold me there? *[She takes hold of his hand.]*

Edw. Wilt thou forsake me?

Edg. Let go my hand: if thou persist, Edwina, 180
To hold me thus, a thousand, thousand furies,
And each more horrible than death shall haunt me,
'Till phrenzy-struck, with mine own hand I seize
This recreant heart and pluck it from my breast.

Enter EDWIN, hastily.

Ed. Thus art thou found? Thro' deluges of blood,
Launch'd from the noblest veins in all this isle,
Fighting I sought thee: Fly, ill-fated Prince—

Edg. What do I hear? Is it not victory?

Ed. Curse on the strumpet fortune, she revolts 190
And sides with Normandy; their seeming flight
Was but a feint; upon the word they halted,
Check'd in their mid-career; then wheeling swift
With thick-clos'd files charg'd our disorder'd ranks,

That reel'd upon the shock : A faithless band,
Led by Earl Waltheof, that still veering traitor,
Went over to the foe.

Edg. Lives Harold yet ?

Ed. From helmet to the heel all red with blood,
And gash'd with glorious wounds, he call'd me to him,
And bade me say, that with his dying breath 200
To thee and to Matilda he bequeaths
All that is left of England.

Edg. Lead me to him !

Edw. To death as soon !

Ed. Retire to safer ground.

Edg. Retire ! shall Edgar fly, whilst Harold fights ?
Off, let me go.

Edw. Nay, if my arms can't hold thee——

Edg. O, thou soft Syren !—take her, noble Edwin,
Take my soul's better part before I sink 210
To infamy—Oh, take her from my heart. [*Exit.*]

Edw. If thou hast love or pity in thy bosom,
Haste and preserve him ! [*Exit Edwin.*]
Oh, this rives my heart.

Earth, earth, receive a wretch. [*She falls on the ground.*]

*Enter MATILDA with Attendants, having discovered EDWINA
on the Ground, she advances hastily to her.*

Mat. She faints : she falls !
Look up, Edwina ! Is it death's resemblance,
Or death itself ? She lives. Help me to raise her.

[*They raise her.*]

Edw. Matilda !

Mat. Start not ! I am yet thy friend. 220

Edw. Fly then and save——O, Heaven !

Mat. Thy Edgar——No.

I saw your hero dart into the fight
As the train'd swimmer springs into the flood.

Edw. Art thou a woman ?

Mat. Would to Heaven I were not !

Then I had grappled on your warrior's side
And struck for England, for my father—Oh !
I look'd but now, and saw a storm of blood,
A raging ocean scatter'd o'er with wrecks : 230
Fir'd at the sight I snatch'd a javelin up
Some warrior's haste had dropt—the feeble weapon
Fell from my woman's hand : Again I look'd,
No English banner floated in the air,
Save where my father fought ; revolting nature
Shrunk from the scene, and soon a scalding flood
Of tears burst forth that quench'd these orbs of sight.

Edw. Where shall I turn ?

Mat. To death.

Edw. Dreadful resort ! 240

Mat. And yet when hope, our last kind nursing friend,
Forsakes her patient's couch, and dark despair
Puts out that light, which like a nightly beacon
Points to the harbour, where the foundering bark
Of misery may steer. Ah, whither then
Shall life's benighted passenger resort,
But to oblivion and th' all covering grave ?

Edw. Why then, when death had arm'd my uplifted hand,
Didst thou prevent the blow and bid me live ?

Mat. Live but till Edgar falls, then rear the blow, 250
I'll not prevent it—Hah ! what bleeding man !

Enter NORTHUMBERLAND supported by Soldiers.

North. A little onward yet—Enough, enough !
Good fellow, hold thy kerchief to my side.

Run one of you and bring me speedy word,
What troops those are, which wilfully maintain
A dying kind of combat ; if there 's hope
Make signal with your hand and shout—staunch, staunch,
my wound——

My curse upon that Norman Boar, Fitz Hugh ;
His tusk has ript my heart-strings ; yet I cleft him,
Did I not, soldiers ?—Soft, for mercy's sake. 260
Jesu Maria, what a pang was that !
Look out ; no sign of hope ?—None, none ; all 's lost——
Hence, stand off !——

[He smites his breast with anguish and breaks from the soldiers.
Wide as the grave I rend this bleeding breach.

[He tears open his wound.

Fall, England ! fall, Northumberland !—'Tis past.

[He falls into his soldiers arms, and expires.

Mat. Farewell, stout heart ! how better thus to fall
By death hewn down, than to outlive the leaf,
And drop a sapless ruin ! let me view thee :
Is death no more than this ? why thou, Edwina,
Or I, or any one may do as much. 270
Life, like a worn-out garment, is cast off,
And there 's an end : I thank thee for the lesson,
'Twill stand me much in use—bear him away.

[The soldiers take off the body.

Enter EDGAR, EDWIN, and Soldiers.

He lives, he comes ! hence to the winds, my fears ;
There's blood upon thy scarf.

Edg. Then it was struck
From Norman veins.

Mat. Where is my father ?

Edg. Ha ! Edwin !

Ed. My lord. 280

Edg. The foe suspends pursuit,
And calls his conquering legions back from slaughter :
Run, Edwin, run and take thy ensign with thee;
Here on the craggy summit of the cliff
Wave it aloft, and call the stragglers up
To form upon the heights; these still are ours. [*Exit Ed.*

Mat. Where is my father? Where are all the heroes,
Whom I have seen return triumphant home,
With victory eagle-wing'd upon their helm?

Edg. All lost, with thousands upon thousands sunk 290
And swallow'd up in death!

Mat. Death, say'st thou?

Edg. Hearken!

The hireling troops had fled; one native phalanx
Fatally brave yet stood; there deep engulf'd
Within the Norman host I found thy father,
Mounted like Mars upon a pile of slain :
Frowning he fought, and wore his helmet up,
His batter'd harness at each ghastly sluice
Streaming with blood; life gush'd at every vein, 300
Yet liv'd he, as in proud despight of nature,
His mighty soul unwilling to forsake
It's princely dwelling; swift as thought I flew;
And as a sturdy churl his pole-axe aim'd
Full at the hero's crest, I sprung upon him
And sheath'd my rapier in the caitiff's throat.

Mat. Didst thou? then thou art faithful. Open wide
And shower your blessings on his head, ye heavens!

Edg. A while the fainting hero, we upheld;
(For Edwin now had join'd me) but as well 310
We might have driven the mountain cataract
Back to its source, as stemm'd the battle's tide.

I saw the imperial duke, and with loud insults
Provok'd him to the combat, but in vain ;
The pursey braggart now secure of conquest,
Rein'd in his steed, and wing'd his squadron round
To cut us from retreat ; cold death had stopt
Thy father's heart, e'en hope itself had died :
'Midst showers of darts we bore him from the field ;
And now, supported on his soldiers' pikes, 320
The venerable ruin comes. Behold !

[The body of Harold is brought in.]

Mat. Soldiers, for this last mournful office thanks !
Bear him within the tent, upon the couch
Lay ye the body ; spread his mantle o'er him,
And all depart : For this I thank you, Nature,
That when you sent calamity on earth,
And bade it walk o'er all this vale of tears,
You sent deliv'rance also, and with death,
As with a land-mark, bounded its domain,
And open'd an asylum in the grave. 330

[The body is carried into the Tent, Mat. follows.]

Edw. Lo ! where she follows her dead father's body :
She hath a soul that will not bend to grief
And disappointment.

Edg. Haste, beloved maid,
And force her from the body. *[Exit Edw.]*

Enter SIFFRIC.

Sif. And dost thou live, brave youth ? dost thou survive
Those miracles of valour which I saw,
And blushing saw ? for oh, too sure I wrong'd thee ;
Give me thy pardon ; thou hast more than conquer'd.

Edg. Siffric, enough ! It is not now a time 340

For English hands to strike at English hearts,
Else—but 't is past—Where's old Northumberland?
Where valiant Mercia?—Ah! is 't so with both?

[Siffric makes signal of their death.]

Re-enter EDWIN with Soldiers.

Welcome, brave Edwin! thou bring'st hope for England.

Enter EDWINA from the Tent.

Edw. Horror on horror! when will death have end!
Some fiery dog-star reigns, and deadly madness
Strides all below the moon. Scarce had they set
Their mournful burden down, when following quick
She rush'd into the tent, and raising up
Her father's mantle, snatch'd one eager look; 350
Then with uplifted eyes and heaving sighs,
Seizing his sword with strong determin'd grasp
Plung'd it into her breast. Behold, she comes!

Enter MATILDA, supported.

Mat. 'Tis done! the faithful point hath reach'd my life,
And spoke it's errand fairly: Now, my soul,
Now speed thy wings, and fly.

Edw. O, killing sight!

Edg. O, deed of horror!

Mat. Hush, no more of that.

Think'st thou the Almighty's mercy shall not reach 360
To take affliction in? look well at me;
Of friends, crown, country, kinsmen, father 'reft,
Love-lorn, of reason more than half beguil'd,
Heart broke and struck from out the book of hope,
What could I do but die?

Edg. Heaven's joys receive thee!

Mat. Amen ! the voice is Edgar's, but my eyes
Grow dim ; alas ! 't is hard I cannot see thee :
Give me the crown ; quick, reach it to my hand.

[They bring the Crown, and present it to Matilda.]

Ay, now I have it, shorn of power indeed ! 370
But light'ned of its cares ; Edgar, o'er thee
This radiant circle like a cloud may pass ;
But thy posterity to latest times
Shall bind it on their brow. Receive it, prince,
And noble as thou art, O, spare the dead,
Nor stir my father's ashes with thy curse !

[Edgar receives the Crown.]

Edg. Peace to his shade : so Heaven my sins forgive
As I thy father.

Mat. 'Tis enough : farewell !
Life's storm is past ; wave after wave subsides, 380
The turbid passions sink, and all is peace :
Ambition, jealousy, nay love itself,
Last ling'ring, drops into the grave and dies.

[She sinks into the arms of her attendants, and expires.]

Edg. There fled a mighty soul—Angels, receive it,
And waft it to the mansions of the blest !—
And art thou mine ? *[To the Crown.]*

Friends, soldiers—subjects now,
Lord Edwin, Siffric, England's brave remains,
I, Edgar Atheling, King Edmund's heir.
Now take this mournful relique of my right. 390
If you are with me, warriors, strike your shields.

Thanks, gallant countrymen ! *[They strike.]*

Ed. Lo, on his knee
Edwin salutes thee ; King of England, hail !

Edg. Come to my heart, my friend, my more than father !
[To Edwin]

Sif. Siffric, the convert of thy valour, kneels,
And every faculty of head, heart, hand,
To thy free service dedicates.

Edg. Arise !

And take ('tis all your king can give) my thanks. 400
And now, my fair betroth'd, reach forth thine hand,
And touch this golden symbol, whilst I swear,
Here standing in the awful eye of Heaven,
To share it with Edwina.

Edw. On my knees

I yield thee thanks, whilst before Heaven I swear,
Tho' thou hadst nothing to bestow but chains
And beggary, and want, and torturing stripes,
And dungeon darkness ; still thy poor Edwina
For thee alone should live, with thee should die. 410

Edg. Now, warriors, how resolve you ? View that field ;
The Norman, like a lion, swill'd with slaughter,
Sleeps o'er his bloody mess—our scatter'd troops
Collect and form around.

Sif. We live in Edgar :—

Save the last hope of England and retreat.

Edg. Retreat ! shall English warriors hear that word
And from an English king ! No, Siffric, never.

Unfurl the Saxon standard ! See, my lords,
Twice taken in the fight, and twice recover'd, 420
Th' hereditary glory lives with Edgar.

Beneath that banner god-like Alfred conquer'd :
Beneath that banner, drench'd in Danish blood,
My grandsire Iron-sided Edmund fought ;
Wrench'd from my infant grasp, a bold usurper
Seiz'd it, possest it, died in it's defence :
And shall I, in the tame respect of life,
With close-furl'd ensigns, trailing in the dust,

As V.

THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS.

69

Halt in the rear of fame? No, gallant English,
Turn not, but as the galled panther turns,
To lick his wounds, and with recruited fury
Springs to the fight afresh: So turn; so stand!
And from the height, ennobled by your valour,
Hurl bold defiance to the foe beneath.

430

[*Drums, &c.*

[*Exeunt omnes.*



EPILOGUE.

SPOKEN BY MISS YOUNGE.

*FROM ancient Thespis to the present age
The world hath oft been term'd a public stage,
A thread-bare metaphor, which in it's time
Hath patch'd much prose and heel-piec'd many a rhyme,
Ev'n the grave pulpit sometimes deigns to use
The emphatic terms of the proscribed Muse,
Calls birth our entry, death our exit calls,
And at life's close exclaims—the curtain falls;
And so concludes upon the drama's plan
That fretting, strutting, short-hour actor, man.*

*Are we all actors then?—yes, all from Adam,
And actresses?—I apprehend so, madam.
Some fill their part with grace, others with none;
Some are shov'd off the stage, and some shov'd on;
Some good, some bad, still we all act a part,
Whilst we disguise the language of the heart;
Nature's plain taste provides a simple treat,
But art, the cook, steps in and mars the meat;
The comic blade makes ridicule his test,
And on his tomb proclaims that life's a jest;
The swaggering braggart, in true tragic cast,
Bellows blank verse and daggers to the last;
Whilst clubs of neutral petit-maitres boast
A kind of opera company at most,
Whose dress, air, action, all is imitation,
A poor, insipid, servile, French translation;
Whose tame dull scene glides uniform along,
In comi—farci—pastoral—sing—song—*

'Tis all awaken'd by the rattling die,
Club wits, and make—a modern tragedy;
A tragedy, alas! good friends, look round,
What have we left to tread but tragic ground?
Four authors leagu'd to shake the human soul,
Unsheatb the dagger, and infuse the bowl,
At length descending to the least, and last,
We hope the terror of the time is past,
Full sated now with battle, blood, and murder,
England is conquer'd—fate can reach no further,
Bid then the weeping Pleiads dry their eyes,
And turn to happier scenes and brighter skies.

THE END.

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